

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

BIOGRAPHY

Smith, Cecil Woodham. *Florence Nightingale.* London, 1950. Constable. Pp. 615. Price 15s.

THIS outstanding book should be read by all who are interested in genius, heredity, environment, humanity and progress. Those who have lost faith in the latter, or who pine for the "good old days," will benefit greatly from reading in detail of the vast amount accomplished by one woman in the face of almost insuperable difficulty and frustration. The help, sympathy and deep affection she received from most of the important people of her day was offset by the opposition and petty obstruction of the mediocre, who unfortunately form the majority. To understand the immense and complicated nature of Florence Nightingale's achievement and character, the book must be read in its entirety. For eugenists perhaps the most interesting and valuable part of the story is her inheritance—coming, as she did, from remarkable families on both sides. "Though her parents were both handsome, agreeable and intelligent, they were not a well-matched couple." But evidently the genes they passed on to Florence were wonderfully well assorted! Her mother had "great vitality, was indefatigable in the pursuit of pleasure, never tired unless bored, always good-natured unless thwarted, always kind unless her obstinacy were aroused. In the art of making people comfortable, in the arrangement of a house, the production of good dinners, she possessed genius." Moreover, "she came from a remarkable family. Her grandfather, Samuel Smith, had been a well-known character, celebrated for the riches he amassed as a London merchant and for his humanitarian principles. He had come to the assistance of Flora Macdonald when she was a penniless prisoner in the Tower in spite of the fact that he was a strong Hanoverian. . . . His son devoted his wealth to collecting pictures and fighting causes. For forty-six years he sat in the House of Commons fighting for the weak, the un-

popular and the oppressed. He was a leading Abolitionist, he championed the sweated factory workers; he did battle for the rights of Dissenters and Jews. . . . His children did not inherit his altruism," but this was, of course, his grand-daughter's greatest quality. She sacrificed herself and many others ruthlessly to every cause in which she believed. William Smith had ten children, "all good looking, all with immense zest for living and amazing health. He himself at eighty wrote he had "no recollection whatever of any bodily pain or illness." None of his ten children died before the age of 69, six lived to be over 80 and Florence's mother lived to be 92." Florence herself lived to be ninety years and three months.

Her father, W. E. Nightingale, "developed into a dilettante, rich, appreciative, indolent, charming. . . . As long as he had books and conversation he was indifferent to other pleasures." Yet "wild blood ran in his veins" and his forebears had been eccentric to the verge of madness. It is fascinating to see how all these strains were blended in Florence Nightingale and enabled her to carry out the great works to which she set her soul. Not only in this country, military and civilian, but in Europe and especially in India she achieved great reforms. She looked forward to the time when "the country could be handed back to the people of India endowed with the greatest blessing of Western civilization—health."

Florence Nightingale was a wonderful woman and this is a great book.

URSULA GRANT DUFF.

BIOLOGY

Demerec, M. (Editor). *Biology of Drosophila.* New York, John Wiley and Sons Inc.; London, Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1950. Pp. x + 632. Price 80s.

STRICTLY speaking, this useful book should be entitled "The Anatomy and Development of Drosophila," and as such it will earn the